

# SOLIDARITY

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## Pottle and Randle

The peaceniks who came in from the cold

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## Unheard Protest

Four verdicts on the campaign against the Gulf war

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## Middle East Fix

Bush and Shamir's dishonourable peace pact

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COVER PICTURE: Peace activists Pat  
Pottle and Michael Randle outside  
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acquitted on 26 June 1991.  
Photo: Sean Smith (The Guardian).

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SOLIDARITY is also the imprint of a series  
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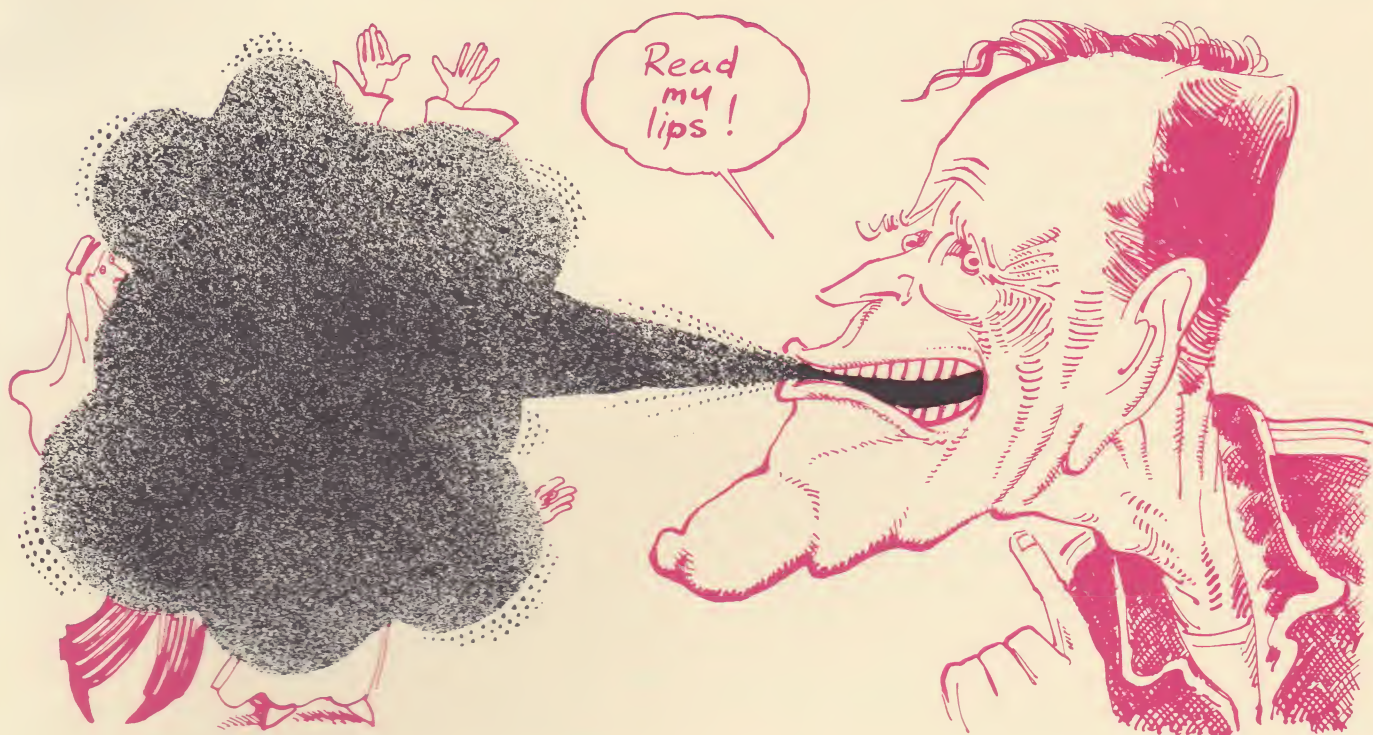
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## PROSPECTS FOR GULF PEACE

# Breathing light on the Middle East



John Jensen

Far from intending lasting multi-lateral peace for the region, the US and Israel are striving to ensure that the Palestinians, and at all events the PLO, are kept from the table. This is how NOAM CHOMSKY saw the interests against a just settlement ranging up in mid-April.

**W**HEN THIS WAR is over" George Bush announced in January, "the United States, its credibility and its reliability restored, will have a key leadership role in helping to bring peace to the rest of the Middle East" (Andrew Rosenthal, 'Bush vows to tackle Middle East issues', New York Times 29 January 1991). With the war over,

James Baker flew at once to the region, meeting with Israel and the Arab allies: the six family dictatorships that manage Gulf oil production, the bloody tyrant who rules Syria, and Egypt. In a "watershed event", they "endorsed President Bush's broad framework for dealing with the Middle East", Thomas Friedman reported ('Eight Arab countries back Bush's plan on Mideast peace', New York Times March 11).



Even critics were impressed. Anthony Lewis wrote that the President was "at the height of his powers" and "has made very clear that he wants to breathe light (sic) into that hypothetical creature, the Middle East peace process" (New York Times, March 15). Helena Cobban found "great inspiration" in Bush's statement that "The time has come to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict", words "spoken with commitment by an American president at the height of his powers" and forming part of his "broad vision of Middle East peace-building" (Christian Science Monitor, March 12). John Judis praised James Baker as the hope for peace, a dove who "has stood for multilateral and diplomatic solutions" and has "emphasised that the US would have to work on resolving the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians" (In These Times, February 27).

The New York Times editors saw "a rare window for peace". "The PLO's Iraqi debacle... could bring forward acceptable negotiating partners" among the Palestinians, permitting "direct bargaining between Israel and representative Palestinians" (March 11) - "representative" being a code word for 'acceptable to us'. The Washington Post agreed that talks between Israel and the Arab states were preferable to an "unprepared and unwieldy international conference", and offer "the best way to make sure that the Palestinians, once they locate representative and plausible spokesmen, will receive their regional due" (Washington Post Weekly, March 11).

The Wall Street Journal announced in a headline that although "Bush hopes for a solution", "the PLO's leaders must want one as well" (March 6). The editors of the Los Angeles Times admonished the Palestinians that they "will have to do better than" Arafat, even if he is "their sincere choice". They must abandon the "leadership that has habitually opted for no-compromise dogmatism at the expense

of conciliation, frequently using assassination to silence moderate opposition voices within Palestinian ranks" (February 26).

The next day, Israel arrested yet another leading Arab advocate of Palestinian-Arab dialogue, Dr. Mamdouh al-Aker, subjecting him to torture as usual and keeping him from his attorney for a month (Mideast Mirror, March 27). This has been, for many years, the real story about "moderate opposition voices", regularly suppressed in favour of convenient fictions, such as the "no-compromise dogmatism" of those who have been far closer to the international consensus on a political settlement than Washington-media rejectionists for fifteen years.

It did not pass without notice that a few problems remain. After hailing the "watershed event", Thomas Friedman added that "The Arab ministers clearly differed with Mr. Baker on one very important detail: how to make peace with Israel". They called for "an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations", while "Mr. Baker, by contrast, said an international conference would not be appropriate at this time". "On secondary issues, such as the Palestinian-Israeli dispute, [the Arab states] still prefer the safety of the Arab lowest common denominator - at least for now".

The official Arab statement after the "watershed event" reveals another "detail", recorded without comment: the Arab allies "demand the full and unconditional implementation of Security Council Resolution 425" of March 1978, the first of several calling for Israel's immediate withdrawal from Lebanon (New York Times, March 12). The plea was renewed by the government of Lebanon in February 1991, ignored as usual while Israel and its clients terrorised the region and bombed elsewhere at will (see my 'Letter from Lexington', Lies of Our Times, August 1990).



In the real world, the Arab allies have some company in calling for an international conference. The matter arises regularly at the UN, most recently in December 1990, when the call for such a conference passed 144-2 (US, Israel). In the preceding session, the Assembly had voted 151-3 (US, Israel, Dominica), for an international conference to realise the terms of UN Resolution 242, along with "the right to self-determination" for the Palestinians (UN Draft A/44/L.51, 6 December 1989). A Security Council resolution in similar terms had been offered by Syria, Jordan and Egypt as far back as January 1976 with the support of the PLO and indeed initiated by it according to Israel. It was vetoed by the United States. Europe, the USSR, the Arab states, and the world generally have been united for years on such a political settlement, but the US will not permit it. The facts are unacceptable, thus eliminated from history.

For twenty years, the US has backed Israeli rejectionism. For that clear but inexpressible reason, the peace process remains a "hypothetical creature". There is one simple reason why an international conference is "unwieldy": participants will support the right to self-determination for the indigenous population.

Friedman observed further that Washington is exploring the idea of peace talks with a "ceremonial opening 'event'" hosted by the US and USSR. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir would find this preferable to an "open-ended, gang-up-on-Israel international conference" (New York Times, March 28). Judis detected Baker's benign hand in this move towards peace.

In the real world, Washington is willing to allow the Soviet Union to co-host a ceremonial "event" on the assumption that in its current straits it will follow orders. But as Kissinger warned years ago, Europe and Japan must be kept out of the diplomacy; they are too

independent. The President of the European Community and its official in charge of Middle East affairs recently reiterated the EC position expressed in the UN Resolutions, declaring that "The outside powers should not let Israel get off the hook once again"; Israel should withdraw from Lebanon and the occupied territories, and reach a settlement with Syria on the Syrian Golan Heights (annexed in defiance of a Security Council resolution and a General Assembly vote of 149-1). But, they added, the EC would have no major role in the diplomatic process, a US monopoly (Jacques Poos, Eberhard Rhein, Mideast Mirror, March 28).

In their own quaint way, the media acknowledge these realities. The New York Times has mentioned that the US is alone in the world in endorsing Israel's Shamir plan (Joel Brinkley, New York Times, 8 September 1989). But "the Soviet Union has moved away from a policy of confrontation with the United States and now indicates that it prefers partnership with Washington in the diplomacy of the region", the Times later added hopefully under the headline "Soviets trying to become team player in Mideast". This "shift away from confrontation" brings the Soviet Union "closer to the mainstream of Mideast diplomacy" (Alan Cowell, 12 December 1989). To translate from Newspeak: The Soviet Union may join Washington in the spectrum of world opinion, becoming a "team player" in "the mainstream". "The team" is the United States, "the mainstream" is the position occupied by "the team", and the "peace process" is whatever "the team" is doing.

Since 1989, the official "peace process" has been the Baker plan, which, as Baker announced loud and clear, is identical to the Shamir plan, more accurately, the coalition plan of Israel's two major political blocs, Labour and Likud. Palestinians will be limited to discussing its modalities, with



the PLO excluded. The current pretence is that when "the Palestinians supported Iraq during the Gulf War and endorsed its missile attacks on Israel, Mr. Baker's response was to freeze the Palestine Liberation Organisation out of his talks" (Friedman, New York Times, April 14). In reality, all of Baker's conditions were explicit long before the Gulf war.

The Baker-Shamir-Peres plan had three "basic premises". First, there can be no "additional Palestinian state", Jordan already being one; there is no issue of Palestinian self-determination, whatever the foolish and irresponsible world may think. Second, no PLO; Palestinians may not choose their own representatives. Third, "There will be no change in the status of Judea, Samaria and Gaza other than in accordance with the basic guidelines of the Government" of Israel. The plan then calls for "free elections" under Israeli military occupation with much of the Palestinian leadership in prison or expelled. The outcome, as Israeli officials have made clear, is that Palestinians may be allowed to set local tax rates in Nablus and collect garbage in Ramallah.

Unlike US commentators, the semi-official Egyptian press finds little "inspiration" in the Bush-Baker rhetoric. Any hopes evaporated after Baker's March visit, when he underscored traditional US rejectionism (al-Ahram, cited in Mideast Mirror, March 27). There were no grounds for optimism in the first place, given that the great power that has long barred any meaningful peace process has now established that "what we say, goes", as the President put it a few days after "staking out the high ground".

A central task of the educated classes is to fix clearly the bounds of opinion. At one extreme, we have Yitzhak Shamir, who holds that the 'land for peace' formula of UN Resolution 242 has already

been satisfied. At the other, we have the opposition Labour Party, which sees advantages for Israel in "territorial compromise" along the lines of Labour's Allon plan, leaving Israel in control of the useful land and resources but without responsibility for most of the Arab population. The US is an honest broker, merely seeking peace and justice, trying to steer a path between "the conditions the Arab nations and Israel have put on their possible participation in any peace conference" (Friedman, New York Times, April 13). The world is off the spectrum entirely.

One technique is to attribute to "good Arabs" positions held by the Washington-media alliance. Thus in Friedman's version of history, in Jerusalem in 1977 President Sadat "offered the Israeli people full peace in return for a full withdrawal from the Sinai desert" (New York Times, April 14). This was Menachim Begin's position, while Sadat reiterated the international consensus. And now, Friedman writes, "The Arab countries have been demanding that Israel commit itself to an interpretation of 242 that leaves open the possibility of trading land for peace" (New York Times, April 10). As he knows, they reject this US-Israeli formula, joining the world in an interpretation of 242 that calls for political settlement on the internationally recognised (pre-June 1967) border.

Palestinians and authentic Israeli doves have commonly regarded the Labour-US 'territorial compromise' variety of rejectionism as "much worse than the Likud's autonomy plan" (Shmuel Teldano, endorsing the observation of Palestinian moderate Attorney Aziz Shehadah, Ha'aretz, March 8 1991). The reasons are well-known, but must remain as deeply buried as the true history.

Washington's rejectionist stance must be adopted as the basis for reporting and discussion, while its advocates are lauded as doves who



intend to "breathe light" on the problems of suffering humanity. The US and Israel can then proceed with the policy articulated in February 1989 by then Defence Secretary Yitzhak Rabin of the Labour Party, when he informed Peace Now leaders that the US-PLO dialogue was only a means to divert attention while Israel suppresses the intifada by force. The Palestinians "will be broken", he assured them, reiterating the prediction of Israeli Arabists forty years earlier: the Palestinians will "be crushed", will die or "turn into human dust and the waste of society, and join the most impoverished classes in the Arab countries". Or they will

leave, while Russian Jews flock to an expanded Israel, leaving the diplomatic issues moot, as the Baker-Shamir-Peres plan envisions.

New excuses will be devised for old policies, which will be hailed as generous and forthcoming. Failure will be attributed to the "no-compromise dogmatism" of the extremists who fail to adapt to Washington's "broad framework for dealing with the Middle East", which is by definition right and JUST.

● This article originally appeared in the May 1991 issue of the New York journal Lies of Our Times.

## NEW WORLD ORDER

# New world chaos

**Bush's 'New World Order', explains MILAN RAI, is the just the same old post-war world-domination blueprint tempered slightly by realpolitik.**

**A** SENIOR WHITEHALL official is reported to have said of President Bush's "New World Order", "It's not about the world. It's about parts of the world. It's not new. It's tacking onto existing bits of machinery and it's certainly not going to be orderly". If this is the new order of the world, what was the old 'World Order'? And is there much difference between the two? As the unofficially-expressed view conceded, in large measure the changes to the dominant structure of international affairs are modifications to "existing machinery" and not a radical overhaul.

In the present context, the old 'World Order' refers to the system of bi-polar superpower domination following the Second World War, otherwise known as the Cold War. Before World War Two, European

imperialism dominated the world, with Britain alone commanding a quarter of the world's surface. The fratricidal blood-bath in Europe broke the economic basis of the various empires and opened up opportunities for the United States, whose economy had been revived rather than damaged by the war, so that by 1950 the US was producing half of the world's output. In Britain, the bankruptcy was total: by 1945 Britain's foreign debt was far greater than that of all Western Europe combined.

John Maynard Keynes commented on US assistance in 1946: "The American loan is for £937 million... estimated political and military expenditure [in the three years 1946-48] is £1000 million. Thus it comes out in the wash that the American loan is primarily required to meet the political and military



expenditure overseas... The main consequences of the failure of the loan must, therefore, be a large-scale withdrawal on our part from international responsibility". The US financed the maintenance, and in some cases the re-imposition, of European imperialism in the Third World.

These European arrangements were however to take place within a larger framework directed from Washington. The US business policy group, the Council on Foreign Relations, had begun planning the post-war world in conjunction with the State Department in 1940. The War and Peace Study Group set out "the requirement[s] of the United States in a world in which it proposes to hold unquestioned power" (quotations are from Laurence Shoup and William Minter, Imperial Brain Trust, 1977). This entailed the creation of what they described as the "minimum world area essential for the security and economic prosperity of the United States and the Western Hemisphere", which they termed the "Grand Area".

A sub-group commented "the Grand Area is not regarded by the Group as more desirable than a world economy, nor as an entirely satisfactory substitute". The overriding concern was neither "security" nor "prosperity", but the need to discover "what elbow room the American economy needed in order to survive without major readjustments", readjustments which might have threatened business interests in North America. In its final form the 'Grand Area' consisted of the Western hemisphere, the United Kingdom, the remainder of the British Commonwealth and Empire, the Dutch East Indies, China and Japan itself.

Britain had two roles to play in this scheme. One was as a market for the agricultural surpluses of the Western hemisphere and Pacific region. One study group reported in 1940 that "Some form of integration of the Western Hemisphere serves very well indeed the needs of the

United States, but it does not serve the needs of other economies. It appears this can be done only by the preservation for them of their vital market - the United Kingdom". In order to establish a stable and durable system of US domination, the UK would have to be maintained as a consumption area. This function has altered over time.

Britain's other role in the old 'World Order' also diminished in significance - British military power was for some time useful as a surrogate for US forces, especially in the crucial Persian Gulf region. In the immediate post-war period, the US largely wrested control of the energy resources of the Middle East from France and Britain, fulfilling Churchill's fears, expressed in a cable to Roosevelt in February 1944, "There is apprehension in some quarters here that the United States has a desire to deprive us of our oil assets in the Middle East on which, among other things, the whole supply of our Navy depends" (Gabriel Kolko, The Politics of War, 1968).

Nevertheless, Britain retained a considerable stake in the Gulf region, and maintained military forces there until 1971. American historian William Stivers comments that "No objective was more central to US Indian Ocean planning than to preserve a British presence East of Suez" (America's Confrontation with Revolutionary Change in the Middle East, 1986).

And so to the 'New World Order'. Its two main features are the concomitants of the dismantling of Soviet power and the emergence, over the last twenty years, of Western Europe and Japan as economic rivals to the United States. The Cold War is not over, however. The Cold War was a mechanism by which "the rulers of the superpowers mobilize[d] their own populations to support harsh and brutal measures against victims within what they take to be their respective



domains" (Noam Chomsky, Towards a New Cold War, 1982). Just because the Soviet Union has thrown in the towel does not mean the pattern of Western intervention is to be interrupted.

The emergence of a tri-polar world economy, with Washington, Tokyo and Bonn as the centres of economic power has made it necessary for the US military, in the words of one Financial Times writer, to assume "a more explicitly mercenary role than it has played in the past" (quoted by Chomsky, Guardian, January 10).

At the end of April, Alex Brummer reported that the last meeting of the Group of Seven - the seven most powerful capitalist economies - "was among the most acrimonious of recent times, with the Germans and Americans divided over the Bundesbank's tight credit policy" (Guardian, April 29). "At the heart of the division is the rising panic in the Bush administration over the failure of the US economy to respond to the stimulus of lower interest rates... The White House and US Treasury fear that high real rates of interest in Germany and other European countries threaten recovery in the US and could lead to Global recession" (Guardian, April 27).

This is, in part, the explanation for US pressure on Germany to take up a larger military role. Robert Zoellick, an influential US State Department official, recently made a speech in Berlin urging Germany, as the world's largest exporter, to take responsibility for the whole world trading system, and not just the EC, or "to contribute on the economic side" (International Herald Tribune, April 25).

Britain has a significant role within this new framework as chief lieutenant in the new mercenary army, and leader of the new European rapid deployment force. The US now sees a European rapid deployment force, acting probably under Western European Union

auspices, as filling the "out of area" role that NATO cannot agree on for itself. The Western European Union is to be a means of retaining US control of European intervention forces, which might, under present proposals within the European Community, develop an alarming degree of independence. Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd recently put the British viewpoint: "Everyone is agreed on a stronger European identity within NATO, and this should be the function of Western European Union".

Senior French military officials, according to Edward Mortimer of the Financial Times, are suspicious of what they fear may be "another British wheeze to inveigle them back into the NATO structure". France is a strong supporter of an EC military identity. In new NATO proposals, by contrast, the British Army On the Rhine is to become the core of NATO's new, multinational Rapid Reaction Force, operating from Arctic Norway to eastern Turkey, but creating the basis for a Western European Union rapid deployment force that could intervene in the Third World.

One problem for Britain is that there are few alternatives to European economic and political union, and this compromises Britain's freedom of action, and undermines the significance of the 'special relationship' with Washington. The US has already signalled that a closer relationship with the real power in Western Europe - Germany - may overshadow the link with London. There is, therefore, a new opportunity for far-Right Gaullism in British politics. James Bellini and Tory MP Geoffrey Pattie urged the restoration of British independence from Washington in their 1977 book A New World Role for a Medium Power.

According to Bellini and Pattie, such "autonomous influence" can be regained by the deployment of new cruise missiles, which "would give



a medium-sized power a deterrent capability of greatly enhanced credibility. Second, the procurement cost is within the constraints currently faced by such a power and, therefore, reduce its dependence on superpower financial assistance".

This previously unthinkable departure from post-war policy came onto the political agenda last year when the Government decided to acquire a new nuclear tactical air-to-surface missiles (TASMs) to replace the WE-177 free-fall bomb. Two US missiles are under consideration, but there is also a proposal for a joint Anglo-French missile - the Air-Sol Longue Portee (ASLP). French scientists have reportedly been involved in top secret talks at the Nuclear Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston, where the warheads would be designed and

built. The authoritative military journal Jane's Defence Weekly comments, "Whether the UK buys from France or the USA may be decided ultimately by whoever London sees as its principal ally in the wake of the Gulf War" (February 9).

To opt for cooperation with Paris implies a new relationship with French military and particularly nuclear forces, and therefore a quite different orientation with regard to any European military identity. The debate within the Ministry of Defence reportedly revolves around cost. The debate within the foreign policy elite is undoubtedly more wide-ranging. The TASM decision is probably one of the most important foreign policy decisions of this government. It will play a significant part in deciding exactly what role Britain plays in the 'New World ORDER'.

## THE WAR WE SHOULD HAVE STOPPED

# Ruthless cuckoos in the dovecot

What really went wrong with the national alliance against the Gulf war? HENRY WORTHINGTON reports a classic case of those opposing the war on principle being manipulated by those who were not. Anti-authoritarians should look out, it could happen again.



**W**HEN SADDAM HUSSEIN invaded Kuwait on August 2 last year, the British Left was as surprised as everyone else. Kuwait was a faraway country of which the Left knew little, the invasion a spectacular interruption to the holiday season. To be sure, the crisis in the Gulf provoked a vague unease, but after the first few

days, when it seemed that Saddam might sweep south into Saudi Arabia, the prospects of all-out war seemed to recede. Once the American forces were in place in Saudi Arabia and the United Nations had imposed sanctions on Iraq, the most likely scenario seemed a lengthy process of economic attrition which Saddam could not win. It did not seem too much of a priority to set up an anti-war organisation.



Not everyone was quite so complacent. For Socialist Action, a small trotskyist group, the time was ripe for seizing. By acting fast it could set the agenda for an anti-war movement. In mid-August, taking advantage of the inactivity of the rest of the Left, it took the lead in setting up an anti-war coalition, the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf, doing its best to ensure that it was effectively under its control but did not appear so.

Socialist Action is a remnant of one of the pro-Cuba factions in the erstwhile International Marxist Group and is no more than fifty strong. It is nevertheless well entrenched in the Labour hard-Left, with significant influence in the part of it that is sceptical about the idea of eventually setting up a 'pure' socialist party to Labour's Left. Indeed, among trot groups it is notable for the depth of its commitment to the Labour Party and its horror of appearing 'ultra-Left': it works more with non-trots than with other trots, whom it despises for raising 'maximalist' demands.

The group is influential in the Labour Left Liaison umbrella group, which includes the Labour Women's Action Committee, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and Labour CND, and it has a major input into Campaign Group News, the organ of the Campaign Group of hard-Left Labour MPs. Unsurprisingly, the platform on which the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf was set up was a 'minimalist' one - "Stop war!" - and hard-Left MPs and the groups in Labour Left Liaison were among the first affiliates.

National CND, for the most part innocent of Socialist Action's existence, let alone its methods, was bounced into joining the Committee by Labour CND, whose secretary, Carol Turner, a Socialist Action veteran, was also secretary of the Committee; the Green Party, whose international committee at the time was under the influence of another trot faction,

the tiny Pabloite group Socialists for Self-Management, was brought in at the same time. The Euro-communist Communist Party of Great Britain and the stalinist Communist Party of Britain, both desperate for credibility, saw a bandwagon and jumped on board, and by early September the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf looked like an impressive coalition of anti-war groups.

**T**he reality was rather different. Socialist Action made sure that it controlled the key positions on the Committee (Turner remained secretary of the Committee throughout its existence), and it blocked attempts by CND and the Greens to get the Committee to endorse sanctions against Iraq, on the grounds that such a move would be divisive - even though the only groups that would have been excluded by such a move were 'revolutionary defeatists' committed to backing Saddam if fighting broke out. (The idea behind this position, first formulated by Lenin during World War One, is that in an imperialist war revolutionaries should work for the defeat of their own side, with the intention of turning it into revolutionary civil war).

For a few weeks, such people didn't bother with the Committee, seeing it as far too reformist: the Socialist Workers' Party and other trot groups put their efforts into setting up a rival to the Committee, the Campaign Against War in the Gulf, on a 'Troops out!' position. But the Campaign soon floundered, and the SWP and the rest of the revolutionary defeatists drifted into the Committee. The result was predictable. The Committee's meetings turned into interminable political wrangling.

Not surprisingly, as the Gulf crisis dragged on through the autumn, the Committee proved incapable of exercising any purchase on public opinion or on the political mainstream. Just about the only thing it seemed to know how to do



was call a demonstration in London - and even then it didn't have the resources to provide stewards or the wit to present interesting speakers.

The Committee's efforts at the Labour Party Conference in early October were particularly disastrous. Faced with a conference opposed to war but not prepared to undermine the leadership (which was anyway rather less than blood-thirsty at this point), the Committee made the extraordinary decision to put up a conference-floor fight on an anti-war resolution it knew would be badly defeated. In result, opposition to the war became identified in the Labour Party with the hard-Left, a kiss of death for any cause these days. With a few days hard work, the Committee managed to throw away any possibility of ever having influence over the mainstream of the Labour Party.

**I**ts attempts to woo Liberal Democrats and Tories were virtually non-existent. To the media the Committee, despite constant damage-limitation by CND, came across as a bunch of unfriendly, paranoid, hectoring and above all incompetent extremists. Whereas elsewhere in Europe large swathes of Centre and even Right opinion opposed war before it started, in Britain the anti-war movement got stuck at an early stage in the Left ghetto. By mid-November, it was quite apparent to the British government that it would face only token domestic opposition if it backed George Bush's plans to evict Saddam from Kuwait by force.

By the end of the year, it was clear even to its own supporters that the anti-war movement had failed, and that the only thing that could stop war was a climbdown by Saddam. The Committee stepped up its activity when the air war began in January (and in February at last threw out the revolutionary defeatists, who had by now become a serious embarrassment), but the number of demonstrators on marches dwind-

led rapidly as a sense of total impotence set in. By the time the land war started, the anti-war movement was on the slide. Perhaps, as the Committee leaders tastelessly put it, support would have grown again if the body-bags had started coming home; luckily we shall never know.

The point of all this is not that the war should not have been opposed. Despite the small number of 'Allied' casualties, the war was a human and environmental disaster. But the peace movement, such as it is, should not now be sitting back and saying that it was right all along: there are lessons it has to learn from the Gulf war.

In particular, it should be absolutely clear to everyone who had anything to do with the national movement against war in the Gulf that not wanting a particular crisis to turn into war is no basis on which to organise a credible opposition: it is essential that the movement from the start excludes those who, in the event of war, will support either side. In the run-up to the Gulf War leninist advocates of revolutionary defeatism did immense harm to the cause of those opposed to slaughter on humanitarian grounds, and the peace movement should have had no truck with them.

It should also be extremely wary of allowing itself to be manipulated by small groups with their own hidden political priorities. Without CND, with its 65,000 members, the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf would have been a mere husk; outside the Committee, CND could have used its resources and skills to promote its clear position of using sanctions to get Saddam out of Kuwait rather than wasting its time and energy on a coalition that could not even agree to condemn Saddam's invasion. If there is a next time, it would be unfortunate to make the same MISTAKES.

● See pages 19-24 for more verdicts on the anti-war campaign.



## THE GREAT ESCAPE

# Starring Hackman, Costner and Cruise

MICHAEL RANDLE &amp; PAT POTTLE

The Blake Escape:How We Freed George Blake and Why  
Harrap, £12.95

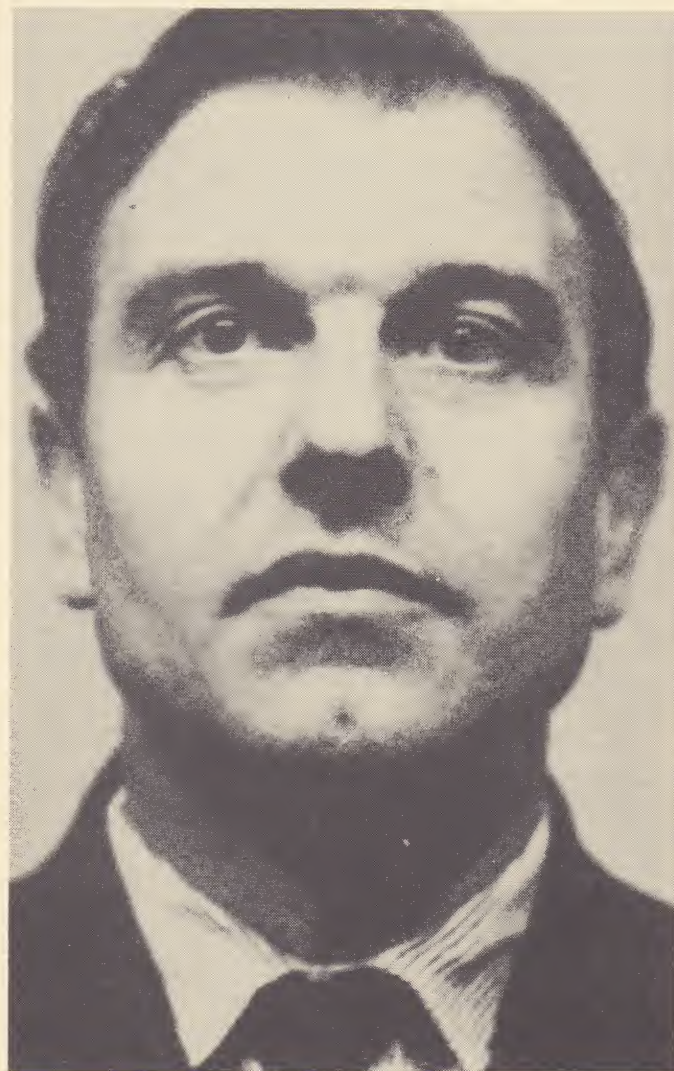
GEORGE BLAKE

No Other Choice

Jonathan Cape, £12.99

**I**N LATE JUNE twelve good folk and true weighed the case of Regina vs. Michael Randle and Pat Pottle in the scales of justice and acquitted them of helping George Blake, super-spy, escape from Brixton jail in 1966. Because they had the sense to ignore the judge and the prosecution, justice was served. Had they weighed the case according to case-law and rules of evidence as they had been instructed to by the judge, the only victors would have been a gaggle of die-hard Tory MPs, and their mentors on the top floors of the Daily Mail and Daily Express buildings. The jury proved that you don't have to be a conspiracy theorist to spot a political trial when you see one.

Unusual as that sort of common-sense is these days, such a verdict would have been obvious to anyone reading The Blake Escape, Michael Randle and Pat Pottle's own justification of why they delivered, unbidden, to Moscow one of its most stunning Cold War propaganda coups while steadfastly maintaining their own independence. In No Other Choice the long silent George Blake justifies his betrayal of the West in favour of the East. All three




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 GEORGE BLAKE: 42-year sentence in 1961.
 

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authors are making their peace with a world that looks upon them as outcasts. Like so many outcasts in their own time, their stature is likely to grow as years pass and new generations whose imaginations are unbowed by the Cold War will recognise their courage and sacrifices in the name of their respective political convictions.

Sufficient time has already passed, one might think, for such a re-assessment to occur. Randle and Pottle are off the hook, but Blake will never see England again, and he cannot even bequeath his book royalties to his children. Perhaps the establishment realised that the



Randle and Pottle prosecution was slipping away from them. With the Treasury Solicitor's injunction on Blake's royalties at least some action was taken that could not be challenged and would pacify the Tory back benches.

Difficult as it is to separate ideology from anything that goes on in Britain, let's imagine this case without it. We would have a completely different story. For months after the books were published Hollywood agents would have been putting up their last Porsches for the film rights. After that, Gene Hackman as Blake, with Kevin Costner as Randle and Tom Cruise as Pottle, would have immortalised this ripping yarn (with only slight inaccuracies) for the silver screen, and their real life counterparts would be living the life of Riley on the back of their percentages of gross box-office take.

It is not too surprising that things did not happen this way. Initially, nobody in government, East or West, could have really believed that the Blake escape was not the devious work of the other side. Indeed, Randle and Pottle did well to leave Blake with the East Berlin police and go home. Otherwise they might have faced the same sort of hostile interrogation from a bemused KGB as they might have had from MI5.

Moscow cannot have been overjoyed to see its super-spy back home, since they had a little explaining to do. One can easily imagine Blake angrily thumping a table in the Lubyanka demanding to know why they hadn't swapped him for an American tourist with one too many cameras. Blake had even met KGB man Konol Molody (convicted in Britain as Gordon Lonsdale) while in jail, and he said it would be a breeze. But Blake did time for four years before it dawned on him that he was not being saved a place at the Bolshoi. Unfortunately Blake does not tell us why this was, although of course, he may not know. He is sure, however, that he was not

offered the immunity tendered to Blunt and Philby because he was not only from humble origins, but a bloody foreigner to boot. Some puzzlement on Randle and Pottle's part would have been in order too. Why hadn't they been given a roasting by MI5?

When Sean Bourke, the flamboyant IRA man who was also part of the escape, published his book on the affair in 1969, leaving Michael Randle and Pat Pottle's identities glaringly obvious, the government chose not to prosecute. One can only surmise that it feared undermining the ideological pillars of the anti-Communist crusade by giving an airing to Randle and Pottle's real motives in the course of a trial. Publicity would also have revived official embarrassment at the escape of Blake in the first place, and accentuated it by revealing that the perpetrators were not specially selected warriors from the massed ranks of Communist 'sleepers' and Cambridge KGB colonels, but a couple of peaceniks. Last but not least, MI6, which was only slowly recovering from a string of scandals revealing lunatic incompetence, would have been sent to Coventry by an irate CIA, aghast that yet another farrago of English muddling had taken place.

Trying Randle and Pottle then would have cast new light on the State's vindictiveness in handing down the heaviest-ever prison sentence in modern legal history on Blake. In the peace movement of the early 1960's Randle and Pottle had proved themselves as highly competent operators in the service of no foreign power, with skills in putting the anti-bomb case and in embarrassing the British government that many foreign powers might dearly have loved to emulate.

Characteristically for pacifists of that era they had no fear of the authorities in pursuing peaceful direct action. They did not find their freedom of action circumscribed by the paranoia typical of



later left-wingers, who often found greater comfort in inaction born of 'certainty' that MI5 was bugging their phones, or by other imaginative magnifications of the power of the state. And they have carried on in this vein, among other anti-war and anti-nuclear activities helping American deserters find sanctuary from the obscenity of the Vietnam war.

The sheer audacity of the Blake escape deserves unqualified admiration. The KGB, steeped in Stalinist bureaucratic traditions, would never have dared to plan such an operation, no more than any Western intelligence service. Indeed, neither the KGB, MI6 nor the CIA have ever sprung one of their own from the dungeons of the other. The truth of this escapade is far stranger than realistic spy fiction.

But Randle and Pottle's book is also a serious consideration of the issues involved in the Blake case. They trash the idea that Blake was shown at his trial to have betrayed agents to their deaths, citing Blake's defence counsel on the point. They even managed a little interview with the petulant Chapman Pincher - 'Our Curzon Street Correspondent' - who was used by the then Home Secretary, George Brown, to circulate the notion on the day of Blake's appeal against sentence that Blake had the blood of others on his hands. Pincher and Brown's smear was allowed to stand because the trial was closed and no one could challenge it.

George Blake's forty-two-year sentence enraged Randle and Pottle and the knowledge that it was out of all proportion, especially because it was unprecedented, provided the motivation for their act. They probably saw Blake as just as much a political prisoner as they were (they were serving sentences for their involvement in a sit-in at Wethersfield US Airbase, Essex), even though their distaste for Communism would have been almost as great as the

State's. The inability of the British media to accept this has clouded their view of what really happened and meant that every media encounter with Randle and Pottle, even after acquittal, has been characterised by large helpings of 'moral outrage'. Michael Randle and Pat Pottle deserve our congratulations for standing their ground so eloquently in court and out.

George Blake's own story is not quite so inspiring, and not half as exciting, as Randle and Pottle's, despite the fact that this was real-life espionage. As the spooks never tire of telling us, real-life espionage is not how it is in the novels, and poor Blake gets tired of repeating the truism. Grilled by Tom Bower in the BBC t.v. documentary about him, his boredom with the endless harping on betrayal and patriotism is almost palpable. You can see he views his acts in themselves as totally undeserving of such attention, and he labours against the assumption of the media that grand philosophising and thorough ideological theorising preceded his every act. The myth-makers of espionage would have us believe every spy tussles with their conscience the way Flaubert would tussle with a sentence. Blake is no genius, maybe not even particularly thoughtful. He fought extremely bravely in the Second World War (as a youngster with the Dutch Resistance, and later in the Royal Navy), and after that "ended up" in intelligence in the late 1940s the way other people end up in teaching. His 'good war' set him up as a spy without his having to think about it much.

However, the war over, his life of daily danger eased up, and he slowed down. He entered academic life to learn Russian; now he had time to think about his work and his future, and now he decided he was a Communist. Reverting to his good soldier type, he did the only thing he thought he could do, switch sides and work for the great socialist motherland. "My aim", he told a Guardian writer last year,



"was simply to prevent Western intelligence services - the opposition - from undermining what I believe to be a valuable experiment, namely building a new society". This is the point at which we, as honest bourgeois citizens, are supposed to fall over in shock and dismay. But his action was in all the best traditions of espionage.

Betrayal lies at the heart of intelligence work, and only the slightest change in direction makes it treason. That is why intelligence services are so obsessed by moles. Professional intelligence officers know that even when they are being 'loyal' every good spy plays informer, makes friends on false pretences, betrays their confidences to other people, lies about their motives, and then uses ideology, bribes or blackmail to lock the unfortunate agent into cooperation. This is what the CIA chillingly calls a "controlled environment" - you or I would say "having them by the short and curlies". If this is the daily toil of being a spy, then the surprising thing is that more of them do not decide to play on their masters the game they play with their agents.

Perhaps the wisest comment on George Blake was a throwaway remark by Robert Cecil, who was once an assistant to the director of MI6 and spoke for the record on the 'This Week' programme. "One talks about loyalties", the aged spook said, "but what were his loyalties?". Cecil was puzzled. He knew that Blake was loyal to his friends. After all, he had helped organise fellow prisoners when he and other British diplomats were captured by the North Koreans during the Korean war and suffered appalling hardships. He had risked a gruesome death at the hands of the Gestapo. And yet he was capable of recruiting somebody and cheerfully despatching them to the wolves of the steppes. He was in other words, a perfect spy.

ANDREW WEIR

## LIBERTARIAN EDUCATION

# Two decades of experiment

NIGEL WRIGHT

Free School:

The White Lion Experience  
Libertarian Education, £3.95

Assessing Radical Education  
Open University Press, £9.99

**N**IGEL WRIGHT'S Free School recounts the origins, history, struggles, successes and failures of The White Lion Street School in Islington, a few hundred yards from Risinghill where I was head until 1965. In contrast to most other short-lived Free schools, White Lion lasted from 1972 until the late 80s because co-founders Alison Truefitt and Peter Newell took care to think out their objectives for the school, to raise money and to engage the interest of well-known educational figures at that time.

In six chapters the author traces the background of the pupils and workers; the nature of the democracy in the practical running of the school and the appointment of workers; the struggles to nurture individual freedom while maintaining the discipline necessary to achieve the objectives of the school; the daily task of trying to ensure that the children learn something of value and the problem of defining what that is.

The fifth chapter discusses criteria for evaluating what had been done. The author writes, "My own opinion is that White Lion did not create an effective learning environment... (because we did not have) a clear theory of learning". The final chapter looks at those areas in which the school was obviously successful; in the relations between workers and



children and between parents and the school. Especially important was the lack of a hierarchy of workers and (a real triumph) the fact that in 1982 the ILEA recognised the collective responsibility of the meeting for the running of the school rather than insisting, as in all other schools, on a single person or 'head' being answerable to them.

A worker from the Frankfurt Free School who took part in White Lion for some time, and visited other Free schools, wrote

they are all adult-dominated... [and] reduce the idea of freedom to the freedom of choice between different offers... In White Lion they can refuse to do 'anything' (of course they want to do something and everybody is doing lots of things the whole day through. But it might be 'just hanging around')... The question, 'What is life about?' is already answered! It is growing up, being socialised into the adults' world.

Central was the dilemma of how to keep up the impetus of any educational activity. Visits and outings would keep things going perhaps for several days but soon new activities would have to be thought up or everyone relapsed into 'just hanging about' or forever playing football or gossiping.

Assessing Radical Education, subtitled 'A Critical Review of the Radical Movement in English Schooling, 1960 - 1980', falls into two main parts: the first seven chapters sketch the background to the radical education movement in the general surge of new critical ideas throughout society during this time: the radicals themselves; the magazines and journals brought out by teachers; the Schools Action Union, the National Union of School Students and the movement for children's rights; and the Free schools. This part of the book forms an invaluable reference section (and has a comprehensive

bibliography). The only major omission, among the wide range of experiments described, is an account of The Terrace, an educational experiment that proved to be the most radical since Makarenko's Gorky Colony, and of which too few people are aware.

The second part of the book discusses the ideas over which radicals have agonised - the nature of learning; the question of resources: should there be more or should they be different; can education be changed without a change in society; is deschooling feasible; how far can children be responsible for their own education?

The Terrace ran for five years from a tentative beginning in 1969 until it tailed away in the mid-70's in result of a variety of financial and political pressures. Designed by Royston Lambert, Head of Dartington Hall School, it was run by Dick and Pat Kitto - Dick was the originator of Education Otherwise. It caused an uproar in some circles because its educational effects were so rapid (ten months), so powerful and so long-lasting on working-class students already dumped by state education.

The Terrace not only transformed the attitudes of the students towards schooling, but of the teachers and parents as well. Yet not a flicker of interest was kindled in a single member of the Labour Party hierarchy, despite many attempts to get them to see its relevance for the mass of our people. Sadly it made even more clear the dismal lack of any profound thinking from that direction. The Terrace experiment needs mentioning here not least because it directly tackled many of the issues that the Wright discusses in the second part of Assessing Radical Education, in particular, the question of how to provide a lasting discipline and incentive for learning that does not rest on mere novelty.



Another signal experiment of the early 70's was Graham Owens' The Module, a project in teacher-training at Nottingham Polytechnic. It was brilliantly successful but so powerfully undermined established thinking that it was destroyed by character assassination. It bears directly on Alison Truefitt's retrospective comment which Wright includes on page 62 of Free School,

I wish I could supply clearly the alternative vision which I feel is needed... I know I felt and wrote, and still feel, that White Lion should aim to be responsive in a much wider sense - to the needs of the immediate community as well as those of the planet,

and on his own conclusion two pages earlier, that White Lion "lacked an over-riding sense of purpose capable of infecting all within it with a clear sense of joint endeavour". Such expressions in both books indicate a sense of failure, yet there constantly keeps bursting through a feeling of joy, as if they know intuitively that what they are doing is good and right, but cannot marry it with acceptable criteria of success.

In fact their own experience has driven them to come very close to the conclusion reached by Karl Marx and John Dewey. Real education can only occur through work in and for the parent community. That work is the key to human life; the creator of all culture; the means by which the individual expresses their individuality and harmonises their own needs for freedom with those of others in creating a commonly desired end. When work rather than 'education' becomes the focus of energy, new social forces arise to give intelligible shape to the activity and place learning, effort, skill, discipline and purpose into a cohesive setting. That was the main lesson of The Terrace and The Module. New skills were learnt without effort because the satisfactions of work in and for the local community was the magnet.

Capitalism has destroyed the creative and social function of work by making it serve the purposes of individual greed. We now have to restore it to its rightful place. From the dawn of humanity education has taken place naturally, within the family and the group, without stress, simply by absorbing children, as they grew, into the tasks that the community needed to be done. Joy - the natural pleasure that people, children and adults, get from being together in work and play - is the incentive. When work is hard or dull but necessary, it is relieved with songs, conversation and stories.

Today, in the interests of profit, the worker is isolated into the stultifying slavery of repetitive response to a machine. Work that is done for mere profit - how depressingly tedious it is to have to repeat facts that have been clear since long before William Morris - is a criminal waste not only of human energy but of the resources of the earth. In such drudgery there is no education. Collective work for community ends is a satisfaction to all and a natural education to the young. In this century, at last, we have come to the realisation that children are not taught: they learn because they need and desire to live as full members of their community.

The work of all those in the radical movement encountered in these pages was of vital importance; we are all the wiser as a result of their efforts. Let the next period - of even more effective work and debate - start now, before the chaos created during the last eleven years becomes disaster. To this end Nigel Wright has done us the most valuable service - all the more so, when so much of the detail was about to slip into oblivion - of placing before us a panorama of the educationally most exciting twenty years of this century.

MICHAEL DUANE



## THE WAR WE SHOULD HAVE STOPPED

# CND stumbles in hour of need

From BEN WEBB, London:

I cannot disagree with the general sentiments of Ken Weller's 'Divided We Fell' editorial in Solidarity 27, yet I think he has missed a dimension of the problem in what he justly describes as the "collapse of opposition to the (Gulf) war". But first, as they say, a few quibbles.

To begin. I think one should be careful with Suez comparisons, as that nasty little war showed several key differences from the war of the 'allies' in the Gulf. Notably, Suez was a multi-sided conflict, and each side had differing motives - Ben-Gurion had a vested interest in a pre-emptive strike against Egypt; America had an interest in setting itself up as arbiter; the two gangrenous empires had their own dubious reasons; and the Soviets, as always, were scavenging for influence. (This is not to forget the target of the aggression, Egypt). In hindsight, it is very clear that Suez was the end of something, in sharp contrast to the Gulf war, which was heralded as the first serious shooting of the 'New World Order'.

This is all to say that with Suez there was a field-of-force in which it was easier to mount the memorable slogan 'Britain Waives the Rules'. The context for effective anti-war action was more favourable; and Ken should not wonder that there were no wildcat strikes or 'riots' against the Gulf war, and that the bulk of the Labour

Party stayed onside with the Americans. The job of opposing this war was more problematic from the beginning - give those who organised opposition to the war their due, or their handicap.

Another quibble, not so much with Ken as with others, is the stress on the 'unprecedented media manipulation' experienced in the Gulf war. While not denying the fact of manipulation, I find the air of offended innocence just slightly comical. What, I have to ask myself, is one to expect from states and armies? The whole truth, nothing but the truth, so help you the Deutschmark?

The serious point here is that in the confusion of reasons for opposing the war, a number of people took the easy route of blaming it all on what we at CND mockingly called the 'meedja'. This to my mind dances too comfortably with the current fashion of reducing all political questions to civil liberties issues; in another camp, it nourishes an upside-down 'totalitarianism' thinking ending in tautology; and in yet another it is a handy transitional programme demonstrating that one solution and revolution inescapably rhyme.

An end to the quibbles. The missing dimension in Ken's leader is the chaotic paralysis of CND in the conflict. In any coherent anti-war movement CND would have had to be the lynchpin - for better or worse, it alone had the resources, the profile and the political roundedness to launch a mass movement. In the event, CND did indeed provide the resources for the public events around which the anti-war movement rallied. But very early on, and for reasons I will try to detail, it lost political control and became the protesting vehicle of a tiny political sect.



Back one step. It is not exactly good geography on Ken's part to locate the split in the anti-war movement between "CND and the stalinists" on the one side and the "trotskyist groups" on the other. Nor is it exactly true to say that CND were "all for the UN". (No one in CND, least of all Bruce Kent, always the standard-bearer of the UN lobby, had any illusions about the hijacking of the organisation, for the purposes of the USA. Many were disappointed, but none were trapped by their pro-UN sentiments).

Forward. The sect in question is Socialist Action, whose lineage is unclear to me no matter how hard I study Mo Klonsky and Chus Aguirre's As Soon As this Pub Closes. This party, described in the pages of Sanity as the world's smallest party (in distinction to the largest of the ex-Communists) swooped into the peaceniks' fold in the autumn of 1990, and effectively dictated themes, speakers and platforms for the duration of the conflict. The task of building a broad front became impossible as the line between opposition to the bloodshed and support for the Saddam regime was blurred through the microphone. Meanwhile, the self-appointed vanguard party and its eponymous publication attacked the peace organisations that desperately wanted to play their part, castigating them as accomplices to imperialism and announcing victory against "the pacifists".

All this was accomplished over the protests, the disgust and the angst of CND's experienced staff. It was abetted by a number of CND's officers, who through vanity, naivety or worse allowed it to happen, to the point of putting one of Socialist Action's cadres on the payroll.

This sort of 'victory' could only have occurred in a void. The immediate reason a party of 200 (they say) was able to dictate the agenda of what could have been a mass movement is that CND was in a

tricky transition period, and was immobilised for a few key weeks. Yet this should not have been determining. The deeper reason is that the ruling councils of CND had already voided themselves of ideas and were unreceptive to those suggested to them; the subsequent efforts to generate a distinctive CND line had the air of damage limitation.

It could have been different. Given the circumstances, we could not have stopped the war. But we could have made an honourable showing, and perhaps awakened opinion about the shape of things to come.

Yours for peace and freedom

## THE WAR WE SHOULD HAVE STOPPED

# Wrong right from the start

From PETER CADOGAN, London:

I am glad to see Ken Weller taking up the question of the sad mess the peace movement made over the Gulf War (Solidarity 27). If we are not to go on making the same mistakes over and over again we need an incisive inquiry into what was done and not done during the war.

The key body, The Committee to Stop the War in the Gulf, wrong-footed it right from its very first meeting on 29 August 1990. At the meeting the combined supporters of the far Left (interested in an anti-American campaign on familiar lines) and Iraqi democrats (concerned, unlike the ANC, to prevent sanctions) managed to do two things: one, bury Saddam Hussein's guilt and ignore the proposed 'Arab solution', that is, that the people of Iraq and their Arab friends could and should take care of Hussein, and two, deflect attention



entirely from the United Nations sanctions and blockade.

What then happened was a highly sectarian campaign based on the slogan "No Blood for Oil!" that never had any chance of attracting anything like mainstream attention. An immense opportunity was thrown away. Almost all the world condemned Saddam's conquest of Kuwait, there was massive support for decisive UN action. It was sabotaged by George Bush with the help of John Major. There never was the slightest need for war. What is more, this was fully understood at the highest level in Washington. Thus a report in the Guardian recently stated: "According to a new book by Washington Post Editor Bob Woodward, General Powell repeatedly suggested that the containment of Iraq through economic and military pressure could accomplish US objectives" (3 May 1991).

One can well afford to be sceptical about economic sanctions as such. They are always full of holes. But when sanctions are financial and military as well how can they possibly lose? All they want is time and that was the very thing that Bush was not prepared to allow. Why? Both he and Major have made it clear. They were afraid that if Saddam was given another three years or so he would have a new range of weapons of mass destruction at his disposal and the means of their delivery. There was no way Israel was going to sit about and let that happen; they would attack Iraq first. If that happened the US would lose its hegemony in the Middle East with catastrophic consequences politically and over oil. A pre-emptive war was therefore called for, and that is what we got.

Some people saw all this at the time, but the truth never got through in any collective and campaigning sense for at least two reasons. The Committee to Stop the War in the Gulf had put a steam-roller in motion and frantic

efforts from within couldn't stop it. As it was, the divisive condition of its own members gave it a very bad press. The papers proceeded to write it off as just another loony exercise even though the Trafalgar Square demonstration was very promising. If a good case had then been made there was still some hope. It was not made, and the coming of the war itself halved the support, as the next Hyde Park action showed quite clearly. The day was lost.

The other big deficiency concerned the The Gulf Crisis Working Group, which had observer status on the big committee and knew the score. The group met week by week on Thursday mornings in Friends House, Euston Road - called by the very respectable National Peace Council. I served on it on behalf of the Gandhi Foundation. It was a thousand miles from the far Left and composed largely of pacifists. But what does that mean in a country that has no conscription? Very little. There is no principle, theory or method that promotes collective action. The Working Group proved a valuable communications exercise, organised pickets outside churches and a lobby of Parliament. There was no way it could go on the streets and it was hoist by its own petard over the UN because while pacifists might support sanctions, there is no way they are going to support a heavily armed naval blockade.

There remains the vexed question of the relations between the main Committee and CND. This is the heart of the matter. The initial impetus (so far as one can see and that is certainly not far enough) seemed to come from Tony Benn and friends, including the Left sects (some of them actively pro-Saddam!) with the support of CND. That support was fundamental as CND was the only body capable of anything like a mass mobilisation.

I remember an early open meeting in Friends House. The place was packed. Anthony Barnett was in the



chair and Benn was the main speaker. Bruce Kent was somewhere at the back of the room. Just about every crazy in London had turned up. It was simply no basis for a serious campaign - but that is how it was. If Bruce Kent would tell us the story as he saw it, he would do the movement a great service. One of the troubles is that the truth probably involves an indictment of Benn. He allowed the organisation to get itself into an impossible position. He himself said (in my hearing) "I am not in the business of apportioning blame" and refused to condemn Saddam. On the contrary, he made a great deal out of his three-hour interview with an international war criminal responsible for countless deaths over many years.

What we have learnt since the end of the war only confirms this analysis. We now know that not only did Bush openly, on world t.v and radio, actively incite the people of Iraq to rise against Saddam, but it was not just one speech. The Americans had a CIA radio station in Saudi Arabia systematically propagating this same incitement. When the Shiites and Kurds rose, Bush declared his half-a-war over and left them to their appalling fate. If we think back to the early days before the shooting war began, and the firmness of the opposition to the impending war that came from people like Dennis Healey and Edward Heath, and from the Guardian, clearly there was a prolonged period of great opportunity that was thrown away. Even the Pope was muzzled by Cardinal Hume and the media!

We need to have done with the shallow instant responses to crises. We need to have done with demagogues. The thinking caps have got to go on and stay on no matter how urgent the situation, and this is all the more important in view of the unpredictable nature of the future. Who predicted Korea, Vietnam, Biafra, Afghanistan, the Falklands and the Gulf? They will have their successors.

## THE WAR WE SHOULD HAVE STOPPED

# Media blackout

From MARTIN EVERETT, Essex:

Ken Weller's leader on the Gulf conflict, 'Divided we fell' (Solidarity 27), stopped short of examining the roots of the failure of the anti-war movement. I'd like to take up the issue. The really decisive factor in what Ken correctly describes as the collapse of the anti-war movement was the failure to start organising against the war immediately after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the American mobilisation started. Insufficient preparation at this early stage ensured that when war became a certainty we found ourselves unable to do more than react as each atrocity occurred. Consequently the anti-war movement was never able to develop its own trajectory, and its efforts were easily countered and neutralised. This lack of preparation also meant that direct-action was restricted to small groups, and small group direct-action can rarely go beyond the symbolic.

A second crucial factor was the denial of media attention to the stance and actions of the anti-war movement throughout the conflict, but most damagingly during the lead-up period between August and December 1990. Lack of coverage determined that individuals and groups felt isolated and unable to expand anti-war activity, and relegated opposition to the war to the domain of fringe politics. The rapid and extraordinary consolidation of the military-state-media axis resulted in a near-total media black-out on reporting opposition to the war, well beyond the normal 'manufacturing of consent' (to use Noam Chomsky's accusation), and determined the anti-war movement's perceptions of itself as small, weak and ineffectual.

Media reporting also affected the anti-war movement in another way



that proved significant, because after the initial US build-up in Saudi Arabia there was comparatively little coverage of events or the continuing militarisation. As the date fixed for attack grew closer, media attention was predominantly focussed on the (often phoney) international peace initiatives. Thus at first there was apparently no sense of urgency, then later it looked as though Iraqi withdrawal might be secured without fighting; and so one way or another a movement against the war seemed unnecessary.

The Left press, and especially the anti-war magazines Peace News and Sanity - not forgetting the two welcome initiatives of the hour War Report and Gulf Crisis Weekly - did of course devote much or all of their space to opposing the war, but generally lacked resources and mass readership. Most importantly, because of the media blackout they lacked an opponent of substance - as opinions are formed in a matrix of media influences. Sadly the main thrust of much Left writing was the inevitable assertion - irrelevant in the circumstances - that the conflict was a "struggle for oil", an opening battle of the "coming war between the first and third worlds", another "Western imperialist/neo-colonialist foray", and so on. No one asked the crucial question: "What tactics do we use to stop the war?".

Yet the war could have been brought to a halt. Opinion polls (for what they are worth) indicated considerable opposition to the war before it started, and during the fighting, large numbers in favour of a ceasefire. If this opposition had been vocal and active the war could have been stopped. The state recognised this, even if the anti-war movement failed to see the potential, and planned accordingly.

As Left and pacifist papers had pointed out, the experience of the Vietnam war suggested that Western publics would not fail to react against a war if casualties mounted

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## VERBATIM

"There are exceptions such as this case when you have to be more sensitive".

**ISRAELI PRISON SPOKESWOMAN**  
apologising after a guard chained a 19 year old Palestinian detainee's arms to the bed posts as she gave birth at an Israeli hospital.

"Organisers of strikes are breaking the law. Strikes interfere with Poland".

**PRESIDENT LECH WALESA**

"Nearly one in four Poles think the old Communist regime has been replaced by a Solidarity dictatorship, an opinion poll published in Warsaw yesterday showed".

**THE GUARDIAN**

"If Saddam Hussein is Hitler, then George Bush must be Tojo".

**WARREN HINKLE**

San Francisco Examiner columnist  
(suspended for this headline).

"We just don't have a function any more".

**TRUUS DIVENDAL**

Dutch Communist Party Chairwoman after her 600 members had voted to abolish the party and join a Left umbrella group.

"Being somebody's girl friend".

**WENDY JAMES**

of Transvision Vamp, asked which was the most overrated virtue.

on the home side. Consequently the fighting was planned so as to minimise the numbers of wounded 'coalition' soldiers. The military strategy would be to rely on air-power and to direct bombing onto unprotected civilian targets. Paradoxically then, fear of the anti-war movement caused the US and the UK militaries to concentrate on bombing civilian targets.

Direct action against the war machine was restricted to small-scale individual initiatives, and there was no attempt at the kind of mass actions that occurred at the start of the eighties. In the early stages direct action would have been better directed at the press. Even the weekly marches through London lacked purpose, and without the participation of the trotskyists (some of whom, as Ken Weller observes, were calling for "victory to Iraq") would have been pathetic. Even the anarchist contingents only seemed to be going through the motions. Because there was no forum for critical assessment of the campaign against the war, the whole anti-war effort was doomed to tail-end whatever compromises could be cooked up between CND and the trotskyists.

Thus the failure to achieve publicity for anti-war activity and the failure to establish effective communications within the movement are key issues, and behind them lies the question of preparedness. If the movement had been ready at the outset, or had at least prepared itself over the months it took the 'coalition' forces to assemble, these shortcomings could have been tackled as they arose, or conceivably may not have occurred. Then anti-war activity would have received the early focus it obviously required, and the prospect of marginalisation could have been confronted at the right time. I don't claim to have the answers to these issues, but I think they need identifying, and lessons learnt and acted upon before the next time.